

AN

2

ANSWER

TO THE

Cam 16

INQUIRY,

WHY ARE YOU A DISSENTER?

K

EXTRACTED

FROM THE DISSENTING GENTLEMAN'S LETTERS

TO

Mr. White.

by M. Towgood.

PRINTED IN THE YEAR 1797.



T

port
our
lishe
who
in t

1

2
in a

3
Del
jam

4
in
(lat

5
Mi

6
W
Fo
no
the
wi



ADVERTISEMENT.

THE design of publishing the following pages, is to instruct those amongst ourselves, who may not have had an opportunity of being acquainted in general with the principles of our dissent, and to vindicate our separation from the established Church to every attentive and candid reader. Those who wish for further information on this subject may find it in the following books.

1. A Plea for the Nonconformists, by *Thomas de Laune*.
2. A Vindication of the Dissenters, by *James Pierce*, in answer to *Dr. W. Nichols*.
3. A Memorial of the Reformation, and of Britain's Deliverances from Popery and arbitrary Power, by *Benjamin Bennet*.
4. The Dissenting Gentleman's Three Letters and P. S. in Answer to *Mr. John White*. With a Letter to a Bishop, (lately reprinted alone) 1 vol. 12mo. by *Mr. Towgood*.
5. A Review of the Case of Liturgies, in Answer to *Mr. Bennet*, by *Benjamin Robinson*.
6. An Abridgment of *Mr. Baxter's* Life and Times: With an Account of the ejected Ministers, by *Dr. Calamy*. Four large vols. 8vo. The Substance of this Work is now re-printed in 2 vols. with many Additions, under the Title of *The Nonconformist's Memorial*, by *S. Palmer*, with 27 Heads of the most eminent Divines.

7. The History of the Puritans, from the Reformation, by *Daniel Neal*, M. A.

8. An Inquiry into the Principles of Toleration, by *Joseph Fownes*.

9. Letters to the Hon. Mr. *Justice Blackstone*, concerning his Exposition of the Act of Toleration, and some Positions relative to religious Liberty, by *P. Furneaux*, D. D. (2d. edit.)

10. Dr. *Wilton's* Review of the Articles.

11. The Protestant Dissenter's Catechism, by *S. Palmer*.

12. *Graham's* Review of Ecclesiastical Establishments.

13. Plan of Lectures on Nonconformity, by the late *R. Robinson*, of Cambridge.

AN



expr
whic
I
fent
peop
lish
conf
unju
T
our
right
of n
the
afflu
inve
spin
for
und
to t
the
it i
inte
Ch
is g
and
hav
ma
eve
I
mi
ma
the
her
an

ANSWER, &c.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I Have remarked with pleasure, that you have expressed a desire to be acquainted with the principles on which we found our dissent from the Church of *England*.

I am not surpris'd that you have often heard us represented as a prejudiced, bigotted, and obstinate set of people, who separated from the mode of religion established in our country, not so much from any regard to conscience, as from vanity and perverseness; but how unjust these censures are, let the following reasons testify.

The FIRST GENERAL PRINCIPLE on which we found our dissent is this, *that no civil magistrate can have any right, authority, or power over the consciences and religion of men*; that his claiming to himself the interpretation of the Scriptures, which contain the Christian religion, is assuming a power with which no civil magistrate can be invested, without directly opposing the very genius and spirit of that divine religion which it pretends to establish: for the Christian religion is an address to the reason and understandings of mankind; establishments are an address to their prejudices and passions. In the one, the love and the pursuit of truth is strongly inculcated; in the other, it is weakened, if not destroyed, by the temptations of interest and worldly preferment. The language of the Christian religion is, *Prove all things, hold fast that which is good*; but that of the civil magistrate is, I have proved and examined for you, and unless you hold fast what I have determined to be right, you shall be deprived of many temporal advantages *here*, and without doubt perish everlastingly *hereafter*.

But besides this undue, this pernicious influence on the minds of men, from the assumed authority of the civil magistrate, I have many other reasons for my dissent from the Church of *England*. I shall particularly instance in her *doctrines*, in her *spirit*, in her *constitution or frame*, and in some of her *offices and forms* of public worship.

SECTION I.

As to her Doctrines.

I Shall first mention two that relate to the power and authority assumed by her in matters of religion, which I think totally inconsistent with the allegiance we owe to Christ, and with the nature of religion itself: doctrines that appear to me of most important and most dangerous consequence. I mention these first, because they are the foundation of all her other impositions and corruptions, and if they are well grounded, we have nothing to do but submit to all her appointments and requisitions, in awful silence.

The first is, (Article XX.) "*That the Church hath power to decree rites and ceremonies, and authority in controversies of faith.*"

The second is, "*That every priest in this Church, from the highest archbishop to the meanest curate in the land, hath power and authority from Almighty God, even in the name of the Holy Trinity, to forgive or to retain the sins of men.*" (See the Office of Ordination, and of Visitation of the Sick.)

These two positions, to which every clergyman gives his unfeigned assent and consent, contain doctrines of the most alarming and most dangerous nature: they are the very basis and foundation of the whole system of POPERY, the two grand pillars on which the enormous fabric of the Papal Hierarchy rests. Admit but the truth of these, and the Church of England is immediately condemned of itself, and overthrown: the glorious Reformation must have been unjustifiable, unrighteous, and schismatical, and all the ceremonies and rites which the Church of Rome had decreed, all the controversies of faith which she had authoritatively determined, all the articles concerning purgatory, image-worship, auricular confession, transubstantiation, canonization of saints &c. which, in a sacred synod at Trent she had solemnly pronounced to be believed and received, all these were to be reverently accepted and religiously observed; and Luther and Cranmer, Ridley and

and Calvin, by presuming to oppose their private opinions to the decisions of the church, were guilty of *rebellion* against ecclesiastical authority, and all their followers, the Protestants, stand condemned of the same crime, and are partakers in the guilt.

Having thus seen the power and authority claimed by the Church in matters of faith and salvation, let us now see in what manner she has exercised these exorbitant claims.

The Church of *England* teaches, and obliges all her bishops and clergy to teach, and solemnly to subscribe, as in the presence of Almighty God, "*That whoever will be saved, before all things it is NECESSARY that he hold the faith contained in what is commonly called the Athanasian Creed; WHICH FAITH except EVERY ONE doth keep whole and undefiled, he shall WITHOUT DOUBT PERISH EVERLASTINGLY.*" And having attempted minutely to explain the inexplicable mystery of the Trinity, and darkened the plain truths of Christianity, by a variety of unintelligible definitions, she adds, "*So that IN ALL THINGS as is aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped. He therefore that WILL BE SAVED must THUS think of the Trinity: This is the Catholic Faith, which except a man believe faithfully (i. e. heartily and sincerely) HE CANNOT BE SAVED.*"

Are these the terms of *salvation* and *damnation* published by Jesus Christ? If not, must it not be an *high crime* against the Majesty of Heaven, for fallible and weak men to publish in his Church *other terms* of salvation and damnation, than his gospel hath established? Have such nothing to apprehend from that awful sentence of *St. Paul*, (*Gal. i. 8.*) "*But if we or an angel from Heaven preach any other gospel to you, than that ye have received, let him be accursed.*" I must beg you to observe that the objections of the Dissenters as such, to this part of the Church's doctrine, did not arise from their disbelief of the doctrine of the Trinity; for at the time of the separation, this controversy was wholly unattended to, and the majority of the Dissenters even now do, I presume, believe the doctrine of the Trinity: but to make the belief of any *human explanations* of it, especially those of that proud and

igno.

ignorant man (whoever he was*) who fabricated this Creed, absolutely and indispensably necessary to salvation, and to pronounce *all* who do not receive it, most certainly and eternally damned, appears an act of such profane rashness and presumption as every good Christian should from his soul abhor.

The Church of *England* also teaches, and commands its clergy, over every person brought to be buried, (the unbaptized, excommunicated, and self-murderers excepted) how profligate or vile soever his whole course of life hath been, with much solemnity to declare, "*That it hath pleased Almighty God, of his great mercy, to take to himself the soul of this their dear brother; they therefore commit his body to the ground, in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life; they give God hearty thanks, that it hath pleased him to deliver this their brother (this wicked and profane man) out of the miseries of this sinful world, and pray God that when themselves shall depart out of this life they may rest in Christ, as their hope is this their brother doth.*"

Is this, my friend, the doctrine of Christ? Hath he not expressly told us, *Be not deceived, neither fornicators, nor adulterers, nor thieves, nor drunkards, &c. shall inherit the kingdom of God, 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10.* Have not thousands of immortal souls probably been lulled into a dangerous security, under an heavy load of guilt, by seeing the remains of men, much viler and more wicked than themselves, thus committed to the grave, with hope that they rest in Christ, and that they are passed into the consolations and joys of Heaven?

It is a well known fact, that archbishop Sancroft was so dissatisfied with this burial office, that he acknowledged to Dr. Tillotson, that for that reason he had never taken on him a cure of souls.

Besides, what inconsistency and self-contradiction is seen in this matter! The *Arians* and *Socinians*, who, in the morning from the desk, before God and the congregation, are solemnly pronounced IMPOSSIBLE to be saved, and are sent down WITHOUT DOUBT to everlasting damnation;

* Athanasius, 'tis well known, was not the maker of this Creed, which never appeared in the world till more than 200 years after his death.

tion :
same p
God,
commu
hope,
I t
derab
again
they
here
holy
Jud
of so
and
in t
Jesu
his
acc
tru
oun
to

tion ; in the evening at the grave, before God and the same people, are solemnly declared *to be taken by Almighty God, in great mercy to himself, and that THEREFORE they commit their bodies to the ground, in sure and certain hope, &c.*

I think you must acknowledge, that there is considerable weight in the objections, which I have urged against these doctrines of the Church of *England*, though they are by no means all that might be mentioned ; and here I appeal to your serious thoughts, if we see the most holy religion of our Saviour (who will also soon be our *Judge*) thus corrupted, deformed, exposed to the contempt of scoffing unbelievers, made a dangerous stumbling-block, and an occasion of offence to inquisitive minds, whether in this case, our duty to Almighty God, our allegiance to Jesus Christ, our concern for the honour and success of his gospel, our love to our fellow-men, our regard to the account which we are soon to give of our fidelity to this trust, do not ALL loudly call upon us to declare openly our protest against these corruptions of Christianity, and to profess ourselves Dissenters from that Church ?

SECTION II.

Of the Spirit of the Church of England.

THE spirit of Jesus Christ is catholic, tolerant, liberal, breathing universal love : its characteristics are mutual condescension, bearing with one another's different sentiments in religion, holding the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle to all men, in meekness instructing those who oppose themselves. Receive one another, but not to doubtful disputations. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant ? to his own master he stands or falls. If
thy

thy brother be grieved by thy meats (rites or ceremonies) now walkest thou not charitably: destroy not him with thy meats for whom Christ died: if meats (rites or ceremonies) make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend. Bless and curse not. This is the spirit of the gospel; but is this the spirit which the Church of England breathes? Let impartiality judge. The acts of uniformity, which are the parents that gave it life, and the pillars on which it stands, shall witness what manner of spirit it is of.

By 1st. Eliz. it declares and enacts, "*That if any person or persons whatsoever shall, by open words, declare or speak any thing to the derogation, depraving or despising the book of Common Prayer, &c. or of any thing therein contained, or any part thereof, he shall for the first offence forfeit an hundred marks, for the second four hundred marks, and for the third all his goods and chattels, and shall suffer imprisonment during life.*"

By another act (9 and 10 of W. III.) it decrees, "*That if any one educated in the Christian religion, and professing the same, shall by writing, printing, teaching, or advised speaking, deny the Christian religion to be true, or the Holy Scriptures to be of Divine Authority, or any one of the persons in the Holy Trinity to be God, or maintain that there are more Gods than one, he shall for the first offence be rendered incapable of holding any office or place of trust, and for the second, be rendered incapable of bringing any action, of being guardian, executor, legatee, or purchaser of lands, and to suffer three years imprisonment without bail.*"

You will also be pleased to remember, that by the act 13 and 14 of Charles II. the church cruelly cast out and deprived of their livings, and threw upon the wide world with their numerous distressed families, a great number of her pious, learned, and laborious clergy, Bates, Baxter, Calamy, Owen, Flavel, Howe, Pool, and near two thousand more.

On what account? Why for no other fault than refusing "*to subscribe the thirty-nine articles, and to declare solemnly before God, their unfeigned assent and consent to all and*"

"every

"every thing contained in, and prescribed by the book of
 "Common Prayer, and the form and manner of ordaining
 "and consecrating bishops, priests, and deacons."

The same illiberal and ungenerous spirit which thrust out in the last age those two thousand confessors, whose names will descend with honour to the latest posterity, hath continued to operate in the present age, so as to shut the doors of the Church against such excellent and worthy characters as Henry, Watts, Doddridge, Grove, Chandler, Leland, Abernethy, Pierce, Hallet, Duchal, Lowman, Lardner, Taylor, Orton, Fownes, Furneaux, &c. &c. names of no mean rank in the republic of sacred literature, illustrious defenders of the Christian revelation, and of the rights of mankind, able ministers of the New Testament, who shine with distinguished lustre (no doubt) in the Church Triumphant above, though they could not be admitted to fill the meanest curacy, or to officiate in the lowest station, amongst the clergy of this uncatholic, imperfect Church below. Nay, upon so illiberal a plan is this Church at present formed, that should any of the most celebrated foreign divines make a visit to this nation (or were it even possible for the Apostle *Paul* himself to do it) not one of them could be asked or suffered to preach in any chapel or church (unless he had first, before some bishop, read the Thirty-nine Articles, and declared his unfeigned assent to the same) under penalty of three months imprisonment in the common jail, without bail or mainprize. Is this, Sir, the spirit of genuine Christianity, of the Holy Catholic Church, and the Communion of Saints? Seriously consider it, then tell me how you would define the spirit of Antichrist.

As a farther illustration of the meekness and gentleness of the spirit of this Church, its Canon (IV) solemnly denounces, "That whoever shall affirm that the form of
 "God's worship, contained in the Common Prayer, hath
 "any thing in it that is repugnant to the Scriptures,
 "let him be excommunicated, ipso facto; * and not be re-
 "stored

* How tremendous a thing this excommunication ipso facto is, let the learned canonists of the Church inform us. "It denounces a man accursed, devoted to the devil, separated from Christ and his Church's communion." Godolphin's Rep. Canon. pag. 625, 626.

“ stored but by the bishop of the place, after his repentance, and public recantation of such his wicked errors.”

Canon V. denounces the same heavy curse upon whoever shall affirm, “ That any of its thirty-nine Articles are in any part superstitious or erroneous, or such as he may not with a good conscience subscribe unto.”

Canon VII. denounces the same excommunication, ipso facto, upon whoever shall affirm, “ That the government of the Church of *England*, under his or her Majesty, by Archbishops, Bishops, Deans, Archdeacons, &c. &c. is repugnant to the word of God.”

The unhappy person who is excommunicated (which may be and is often done for not paying a trifling sum) is not only shut out of the Church, debarred Christian communion, not to be interred, when he dies, in holy ground, but is disabled from enjoying many civil immunities; and if he does not submit himself, and recant within forty days, may be committed to prison by a writ, *De excommunicatione capiendo*, where he must lie till he perishes, if he do not retract; for the Archbishop himself cannot absolve him, till after his repentance, and revoking his wicked errors. Is this the spirit of the gospel and of Christ? we think not; but this is the spirit of that church from which we esteem it our duty to separate.

SECTION III.

Of the Constitution of the Church of England, and of the Church of Christ.

THE Church of Jesus Christ is a holy, catholic Church, and a communion of saints, a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure word of God is preached, and the sacraments duly administered. Article

XIX.

It

It is a holy Church. A temple of the living God, which if any man defiles, him will God destroy, 1 Cor. iii. 17. A holy city or community, into which, nothing that is defiled, no openly profane and immoral person, is permitted to enter, Rev. xxi. 27. The Apostle says, cast out therefore from amongst you that wicked person, 1 Cor. v. 13.

Is the Church of *England* such an holy Church, formed upon this divine model? Is she not in this respect, in the sight of the whole world, a Dissenter from the Church of Christ? Does she not, by her test law, receive into her bosom multitudes of the most debauched, profligate and profane men, and in effect compel them to come in and partake of her most holy rites, and to eat and drink at the table of *that Lord*, whose name they blaspheme, and whose religion they abhor? Is not this what our Saviour calls *taking the children's bread, and casting it to dogs?*

Again, the Church of Christ is a catholic Church, and a communion or community of saints. It gathers together all the children of God, all righteous and good men, wherever dispersed abroad, whatever their particular sentiments or opinions may be, into one blessed society, one family, one body. They are all brethren, fellow-members, in this one household or Church of God, and as such are all to eat as at one table (a communion or common table) in token of their relation to Christ their common Head, and of their affection to one another: for we being many, are one bread, and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread, 1 Cor. x. 17.

But is the Church of *England* thus catholic, and a communion of saints? Observe her conduct. At the same time that she admits to her communion crowds of notorious *sinners* whom the king nominates to a post, she rejects all foreign Protestants upon the face of the whole earth, and all the religious Dissenters in these kingdoms, who, besides acknowledging obedience to all the commands of Christ, will not obey also an arbitrary injunction of her own: that is, all who refuse to eat this sacramental supper in any other than a table-posture, as Christ, and his apostles, and all the primitive Christians undoubtedly did, and not in an adoring posture, as the Pope

and his cardinals, and all believers in transubstantiation, direct it to be done.

"There must be somewhere a very great fault," says archbishop Potter, "when any one of the meanest believers is excluded from communion, who desires to embrace it on terms which God has prescribed."

In the Church of Christ, the Lord's Supper is instituted and used only for spiritual and religious ends: in the Church of *England* it is notoriously both instituted and used for political and worldly ends, as a qualification for a civil or military post. In the former it was appointed with intention and as a mean of uniting all Christians, and of destroying all variance and distinctions betwixt them: in the latter it is appointed with intention, and as a mean of discriminating and dividing them; of separating some Christians from other Christians, and thus of strengthening and perpetuating divisions amongst them.

The rod with which the Church of Christ chastises its delinquents is spiritual, not carnal; but the rod of the Church of *England* is carnal, not spiritual. By the constitution of the former, the excommunicated member is only to be deprived of spiritual privileges, such as fellowship in prayer, singing, sacraments; it meddles not with his civil rights: but by the constitution of the latter, the excommunicated person is delivered over to the civil arm, to humble and chastise him, to strip him of many invaluable natural rights, and, if he does not repent in forty days, to cast him into prison, where he may lie and perish.

Farther, the Church of Jesus Christ is a kingdom not of *this world*, not formed upon the model, not supported by the powers, not shining with the pomps and splendors of this world: it was its glory that it made its way, and was established upon earth, not only without, but in direct opposition to them.

But let any man attentively consider the Church of *England*, and will he not see it to be most indisputably a kingdom of this world; a civil polity or constitution formed after the model, suited to the taste, supported by the powers, shining with the pomps and splendors of this world, an entire creature of the State?

Be-

Behold! the long and pompous train of *Archbishops, Diocesan Bishops, Chancellors, Deans, Archdeacons, Canons, Chanters, Rural Deans, Prebendaries, Registers, Sub Deans, Præcentors, Rectors, Vicars, Curates, &c.* Find you any of these offices in the grand Charter of the Christian Church, the Scriptures of the New Testament? Not the least sign of them there! Trace them back to their origin, they came not, you will see, from the *apostolic* fountain of *Jerusalem*, but from the corrupted source at *Rome*.

But to conclude this head. The Church of *England* is most apparently a Dissenter from the Church of *Jesus Christ*; a society absolutely distinct, as they have two different SUPREME HEADS or fountains of power, whence all authority, jurisdiction, and ministrations in the two Churches severally spring.

In the Church of *Christ* he Himself is the *supreme Head*, the ONLY Lawgiver and Sovereign. To us there is but one Lord. One is your master, even *Christ*. And he is head over all things to the Church. But the Church of *England* has another, a quite different *supreme head*, namely, the King or the Queen of these realms, "vested with all power, to exercise all manner of ecclesiastical jurisdiction; and archbishops, bishops, archdeacons, &c. have no manner of jurisdiction ecclesiastical, but by and under the King or Queen's Majesty, who hath full power and authority to hear and determine all manner of causes ecclesiastical, and to reform and correct all sin, errors, heresies, enormities whatsoever, which by any manner of spiritual authority ought, or may be lawfully reformed."

The *supremacy* in religious matters which the civil magistrate possesses, has been represented as the consequence of a COMPACT OR ALLIANCE formed betwixt the Church and the State. The Church, in consideration of the protection and emoluments given her by the State, has yielded up her *independency* and *supremacy* to the magistrate; and given him power to model her creed, to prescribe articles of faith, forms of worship, terms of communion; and sovereignly to direct, control, and over-rule her in all her spiritual and ecclesiastical concerns.

This fine-spun scheme of an *alliance betwixt Church and State* is at once overthrown by this single consideration ;

That an alliance is formed only betwixt *sovereign and independent* powers ; but the Church is no *sovereign*, has no *supremacy* or *independency* which she can possibly give up. She is a *purchased servant, a subject*, and therefore can have no shadow of right to enter into any *compact*, or to form any *alliance* with the powers of this *world*, without the consent of her only rightful Sovereign JESUS CHRIST. If therefore distrusting his protection, and dissatisfied with his rewards ; if being either frightened by the terrors, or allured by the profits with which the State (that is the world) solicits her compliance, she gives herself up to be governed and ruled by it in things of religion ; if in consequence of the *protection* and *emoluments* which it offers, she suffers the State to make articles of faith for her, and to prescribe forms of worship, and terms of communion, *different* from those which *Christ* has ordained, what can it be called but an open violation of her allegiance to her Sovereign, and having basely forsaken him for the pomps and vanities of this world (which are the sworn enemies of *Christ*) she stands chargeable with what the scripture calls spiritual fornication, and, as such, must expect to feel the consequences of his severe displeasure.

But—when it shall please Almighty God, of his infinite mercy, to pour down his holy Spirit upon both princes and people—a spirit of wisdom to discern the true nature and design of the Christian dispensation—a spirit of fortitude and integrity to avow openly their belief—a spirit of unfeigned zeal for the honour of that blessed Saviour, who left Heaven with all its glories, that he might dignify and exalt us—Christianity will then be stript of the tawdry and vain ornaments in which it is now dressed, and be held forth in its native beauty, to the love, the veneration, and the joy of the whole earth. *Amen! Even so come, Lord Jesus!*

SECTION IV.

Of some of the Offices of Devotion in the Liturgy and Common-Prayer.

WHEN the Reformation took place, under Henry VIII. Edward VI. and Queen Elizabeth, the generality of the people, both *Clergy* and *Laity*, were blind and bigotted *Papists*. The reformers, therefore, wisely attending to the advice of their Lord, *not to sew a new piece upon an old garment, lest the rent be made worse*, Mat. ix. 16. drew up the *present* Liturgy as much upon the plan, and in conformity to the *old*, as the intended reformation would possibly admit: retaining many things, in condescension to the prejudices of the times, which in their hearts they disapproved, and hoped afterwards to remove: but, how fruitless all attempts to rectify the imperfections they were then forced to retain! how vain and ineffectual all the humble supplications, the remonstrances, the magnanimous sufferings, the free and candid disquisitions, &c. of some of the worthiest and best members and clergy of the Church have hitherto been; the experience of near two hundred years, and especially some late transactions, too evidently shew.

The design of what follows is not to point out the several deficiencies, improprieties, redundancies, repetitions, intermingling of offices, injudicious choice and abrupt beginnings of some of the lessons from the Gospels and Epistles, the using two translations of the Psalms, in many places so different from, in some so seemingly contradictory to each other—all which many pious and learned clergymen of the Church have lately done, in *The free and candid disquisitions*. Besides these, there are several things in the offices of *Confirmation*, of *Baptism*, of the *Communion*, of the *Visitation* of the Sick; and of the *Ordination* of Priests and Deacons—which we think to be liable to great objections, to be reproachful to *Christianity*; to be injurious to the interest of real piety and virtue; apt to

cherish fallacious hopes; and to give men wrong notions of the terms of acceptance with God, and of the nature of true religion.

And first; of CONFIRMATION, which is now generally allowed to be *no institution* of JESUS CHRIST or his *Apostles*, but an *invention* of after-ages; never heard of in the Church, as now used, till the times of *Tertullian*, and then performed by *Presbyters* as well as *Bishops*, and immediately after Baptism: at which time also, a variety of other whimsical superstitions were brought into the Church, such as anointing the baptized with oil, giving them milk and honey, &c. And here, I shall not insist upon a manifest inconsistency betwixt *Art. xxv.* and the *office*; the *article* affirming *confirmation* to be not a sacrament, because it hath *no visible sign* or ceremony ordained of God; but the *office* directing the Bishop to *lay his hand* upon the confirmed to certify them *by this sign* of God's favour—for this is of small weight, in comparison with the pernicious tendency of *this Rite* to cherish in men's minds a false and dangerous peace; to give them wrong notions of the terms of obtaining *acceptance with God*, and the gift of *his Spirit*; and thus to lull them into a deep and delusive *security* as to the state of their souls, when totally unacquainted with the vital transforming influence of *real religion*.

For upon what ground, or with what confidence, can the Bishop take upon him, with solemnity to declare to the multitude before him, very often all strangers, even in an address to *Almighty God*—“*That he hath vouchsafed*
 “*to REGENERATE these his servants, by water* (and not by
 “*water only) but also by the HOLY GHOST; and to have*
 “*given them the FORGIVENESS OF ALL THEIR SINS—and*
 “*then to lay his hand upon each of their heads, to certify,*
 “*or assure every individual person, by THAT SIGN, of*
 “*GOD's favour and gracious goodness towards them.*”

You will be pleased to remember, all that is required as necessary to the reception of this inestimable benefit, is,
 “*that they can say the Creed; the Lord's-prayer, the ten*
 “*Commandments, the short catechism, and declare that*
 “*they renew the solemn promise made for them at bap-*
 “*tism.*” Are these a *proper ground*, on which the Bishop

can

can give them the *assurance* of peace with God, and of the regenerating and sanctifying influence of *his Spirit* ?

Delusive fallacious hopes are one of the *fatal rocks* upon which thousands of immortal souls are shipwrecked and lost. This Bishop, by the multitude who flock to be confirmed, is considered as the representative and the ambassador of JESUS CHRIST, as one who hath himself *received the HOLY GHOST*, and is able to give it to others; and who hath *authority* committed to him, in the name of the SACRED TRINITY, *to forgive the sins of men*; who hath taken the charge of their souls, as one who must, at his peril, give an account to the *Great Shepherd*, who will shortly appear. They therefore confidently presume that he would not speak to them a *false peace*; nor *deceive* them in an affair, in which their *everlasting salvation* is concerned. Having, then, with such solemnity, in the presence and name of God, *assured* every one of them (each individual person) by a *sacred sign*, that *his peace* is made with God; that *his sins are all forgiven*; that *he is born again of the Holy Ghost*; and is therefore undoubtedly fit for heaven—no wonder they all *depart in peace*, exulting in their happy state. But, how often before the day is finished, by the riot and disorder with which they return home; or by the little seriousness or sobriety of their after conduct in life, doth it too plainly appear, that these *assurances* of the Bishop were all groundless and deceptive; that he *spoke peace* to those, to whom *no peace* belonged; that he lulled them into a deep and dangerous security; and so unhappily became the *minister of sin* !

There is an awful day coming, in which the *supreme BISHOP* will hold a visitation of his Churches; and then their Lordships, disrobed of all present distinctions, must stand upon a level with the meanest of their people, and give an account to God of the many *ten thousand* souls, over whom they have professed to *watch*; and with whose safe conduct to everlasting happiness they have *charged themselves*, before God and their country. But—if it shall then be found, that by these *solemn assurances* thousands of immortal souls, were rather *confirmed* in that supineness and dangerous insensibility, which is too natural to the mind of man, than *roused* to a serious care to break off
their

their sins, and to become uniformly and truly good—how great will be the unhappiness of being found to have at all contributed to so disastrous an event!

The office of BAPTIZING INFANTS is, we think, also liable to insuperable objections. Strange, and contrary to all scripture and reason, and common sense, are the questions put to the poor infant, and the answers it is supposed to give—*Dost thou believe in God? Dost thou renounce the Devil? Wilt thou be baptized? Wilt thou keep obediently?* Is not this most manifestly to pervert, to overturn, to destroy the very nature of this sacred institution; to give it the air of a solemn farce; and to expose it to the just ridicule of unbelievers?

Religion, beyond all doubt, is and can be no other than a personal thing. Christianity knows nothing of believing, repenting, and vowing by proxy, any more than of being saved or damned by proxy. The whole affair, as it stands manifestly in the article and office of the Church, is this; “The child is declared to be born in original sin, and in the WRATH of God; and deserves to be DAMNED.” God is angry with the infant, tho’ not guilty of any actual transgression, angry even to WRATH; and it is in danger, under this wrath, of sinking into everlasting damnation. How then is it to be delivered from this dreadful situation? Why, without repentance and faith there is no remission of sins, nor reconciliation to God: but the child being unable to repent, and believe and vow for itself, the parent procures two or three sponsors to repent and believe and vow in its stead: and to the child having thus vowed and believed by proxy before God, the eternal Majesty of Heaven lays by his wrath; his anger is appeased; the child’s sins are forgiven, he is taken into the divine family, and is become an heir of eternal life! Is there nothing in all this, like a profanation of the name of God; like a shameful exposing the Religion of CHRIST to just scorn and contempt! How is it, that amidst so much knowledge and good sense, as confessedly shine in both the superior and inferior orders of this Church, so amazing an absurdity is suffered to remain!

Farther; there are some parts of the Liturgy which seem strongly to favour, if not expressly to acknowledge, the

the absurd doctrine of TRANSUBSTANTIATION. For though article xxviii. says, "that *transubstantiation* cannot be proved by holy writ, but is repugnant to the plain words of scripture." Yet, what avails this, the *papist* will say; TRUTH will force its way, through seeming opposition: in your *Catechism*, the Church instructs her children to believe, "that the body and blood of Christ are VERILY and INDEED taken, and received by the faithful in the Lord's Supper." And the communicant is directed, just before receiving the elements, to pray—Grant us, gracious Lord, so to eat the *Flesh* of thy dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body; and our souls washed through his most precious blood—and that we may be made partakers of his most blessed body and blood—"

Are not these expressions far too strong for those who believe that there is nothing before them but mere bread and wine; which they are to eat and drink only in remembrance of our Lord's death? Do they not naturally, if not necessarily, convey the idea of the body of our Lord being verily and really present in that sacrament; and that by being taken into our bodies, it has some efficacy, some power, some secret, invisible, inexplicable operation to sanctify and cleanse our bodies, and to work some happy effect upon them? These, and other parts of the liturgy, were so little disagreeable to the Church of Rome, that the Pope (as Heylin and Camden say) seemed willing to confirm it by his papal authority; and that it was offered in his name, if the Queen (*Elizabeth*) would acknowledge the primacy of that see.

The offices of *Ordination* and *Visitation of the Sick* appear to us, likewise, loaded with insuperable difficulties; containing matters of just offence to every serious and sober mind; reproachful to christianity; extremely apt to ensnare the conscience, and to send the priest into the world, and the sick man out of it, under a dangerous delusion.

Of every young candidate, who comes to him for orders, the Bishop, as in the presence, and as the ambassador of JESUS CHRIST, demands—"Do you trust that you are INWARDLY MOVED by the HOLY GHOST to take upon
"you

"you this office?" to which he replies, "*I trust that I am so moved.*" Upon which the Bishop proceeds to invest him with this office, in this extraordinary form of words—"RECEIVE the HOLY GHOST for the office of a priest—whose sins thou forgivest they are forgiven; whose sins thou retainest they are retained; in the Name of the Father, the Son and the HOLY GHOST. Amen." The young priest, sent out into the world with this transcendent commission, is called to visit a sick or dying person of his cure; after some pious exhortations he is directed to examine,—"*Whether he believes the articles of the apostles creed: and truly repent him of his sins; and be in charity with all the world; and to move him to make a special confession, if his conscience is troubled with any weighty matter.*" After which, the priest is directed to absolve him (if he humbly and heartily desire it) in this most solemn manner:

"Our LORD JESUS CHRIST, who hath left power to his Church to absolve all sinners who truly repent and believe in him, of his great mercy forgive thee thine offences: and by the AUTHORITY committed to me, I ABSOLVE thee from ALL THY SINS; in the Name of the FATHER, of the SON, and of the HOLY GHOST. Amen."

Upon the three several parts of this important transaction, I beg leave to make the three following remarks.

First. As to the question—"Do you trust that you are inwardly moved by the HOLY GHOST?" Who that considers how many rich livings are in the gift of families, whose sons or dependents are educated for the church, entirely with a view of its being, in future life, a genteel provision for them: and what force the high dignities and emoluments, attending this path of life, must naturally have to move a young mind to choose this occupation—can, with the utmost stretch of charity, conceive this to be a proper question to be put to the young student, just emerging from the gaiety of an university education? Must it not involve in extreme difficulties both parties concerned in this solemn transaction?

Secondly. When the Bishop, laying his hand upon the student's head, says, "RECEIVE THE HOLY GHOST, for the office of a priest—whose sins thou forgivest, they are
"for-

"forgiven; whose sins thou retainest, they are retained; in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Amen."—Doth he really know that he hath power from God to give the priest the *Holy Ghost*; and that he hath authority from the SACRED TRINITY to invest him with this transcendent power of *forgiving or retaining sins*? If he does not know that he hath; much more, if he is conscious that he hath not this power; how tremendous a trifling is it in matters of the most awful moment!

Thirdly. The last remark I shall make, is upon the priest's executing this important trust, when called to visit a sick or dying parishioner—Upon his declaring his belief and repentance, as above recited, how wicked, profane, or profligate soever his whole former life has been, the priest is ordered to quiet his conscience from all painful apprehensions; to give him a full pardon of all his offences;—and to say, *By the AUTHORITY committed to me, I absolve thee from all thy sins, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen.* How easy a passport to Heaven, if safe: but, if not safe; if it be all a solemn farce; if it be deluding an immortal soul with fallacious and vain hopes; and putting a dangerous cheat upon it in a matter wherein its everlasting interest is concerned—who may not justly tremble to have any share in it? How amazing that such an office is suffered to stand in this reformed Church—but how infinitely deplorable, that every clergyman in it "must solemnly declare, and subscribe with his hand, his unfeigned assent and consent to this office, and that of Ordination, and to all and every thing contained in and prescribed by the book of Common Prayer!"—When will the disgraceful yoke be broken from their necks! and a spirit of just indignation rise against every encroachment on the rights of conscience; every profanation of the name of God; every notorious corruption and prostitution of the christian faith to secular and sordid ends!

I shall make no remarks upon several other vain and trifling *superstitions*, which have been adopted from the Church of Rome, and admitted into this reformed, this protestant Church—such as bowing at the Name of Jesus—consecrating Churches—worshipping they know not what, and know not why, toward the East—the Cross in Baptism—the reading, in assemblies of christian worship,

(to

(to the exclusion of several useful parts of *holy scripture*) the spurious, ridiculous, romantic stories of *Bel* and the *Dragon*—*Susanna*—the *amorous Devil*, who for love of a fair damsel slew seven unhappy husbands, who fell victims to his jealousy, on the *nuptial* night; but was smoaked away by the magic fumes of good *Tobia's* fish's liver.—

But—here I rest the grounds and merits of our DISSENT. Having proved, I trust, beyond doubt, that in *no one thing* we are *dissenters* from the *Church of England*, but only in *those things*, wherein she herself is, and knows herself to be a DISSENTER from the CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST. *

The present scene will soon be closed: an important and everlasting one will quickly succeed. *There* every man will rise into dignity and glory, or sink into shame and everlasting reproach, according to his piety and the integrity of his present conduct. It is the wise appointment of Heaven, that TRUTH and RIGHT, genuine, uncorrupt *Religion*, should now generally labour under some worldly discouragements; to try the patience, the faith and the integrity of men: that *they who are approved*, men of probity and real piety, *may be thus shewn and made manifest*. But to those, who, *by a patient continuance in well doing*, by an unshaken adherence to TRUTH and RIGHT, amidst all temporal discouragements *seek the glory and honour* of approving themselves to God, and discharging faithfully their duty, *to them will be given stations of exalted dignity* in the kingdom of the Messiah; and they shall receive that perfection of all the glory, and all the happiness, of which the *human soul* is capable, called ETERNAL LIFE.

There let my lot and my portion be given me, will every *real christian* say: I am content, if it be the will of Heaven, to follow the great Leader and *Captain of my salvation through suffering in this world*; in the assured hope of thereby rising with him into so much the greater glory and felicity in the other.

I remain your sincere friend,

A DISSENTER.

* I might add, and could give abundant proofs of it (in the limits I have prescribed myself allowed it) that in no one thing do we differ from the Church of England, either as to her doctrines, her offices, her spirit, in which we are not countenanced by many of her most respectable members and divines. There always have been multitudes, and the number is continually increasing, of sensible and candid men, both among the clergy and laity, who have seen, have acknowledged, and have lamented the many imperfections with which the Establishment of the Church of England is chargeable, and have earnestly wished and laboured for a reform.